

Testimony for Senate Finance Committee

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Testimony Submitted by Melinda Swan:

Chair Dolan and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to speak today on Sub HB33, Amendment HC1940. My name is Melinda Swan, and I'm here to offer additional background on Greater Common Good, a nonprofit dedicated to creating innovative solutions to policy issues, and a proposed pilot initiative with five community-based correctional facilities and halfway houses aimed at reducing recidivism and supporting recovery among justice-involved people.

Let me first offer some background. Eight years ago, I was assisting a local alcohol, drug and mental health board as it conducted research on people on the front lines of addiction. We listened to police, fire and EMS, providers, Emergency Room staff, people in recovery, people still actively using, family members and more.

One critical point emerged from this work for me: our lack of treatment beds and clinicians pose problems that will not be easily resolved nor soon. Further, almost 90% of people with a substance use disorder will not get treatment. When we ask ourselves why, barriers of affordability, access and stigma deter many people from getting help.

Technology can help bridge these barriers. And with the help of a team of experts, including Drs Andrew Moss and Kelly Kelleher who are with me here today, as well as extensive ongoing relationships with people on the frontlines such as probation officers and specialty docket judges, we developed a technology platform called Anchor4Me that is designed specifically as a recovery support tool for justice-involved people.

The platform is now accessible to more than 800 people, most of whom are in Franklin County, but some are also working with courts and providers in Geauga, Union, Logan/Champaign counties as well. We're taking some of the best practices in treatment and recovery and making them accessible through our participant's phones or laptops, with components that draw upon motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy, virtual peer support, and the use of virtual reality combined with guided meditation to positively deal with trauma, stress and anxiety.

Today, research documents the value and efficacy of digital and virtual mental health and recovery treatment tools. And, we are excited by the ways our platform can help people, especially as they return to community. People like Angela Gatliff who is working third shift and can't go to typical meetings or counseling sessions and wrote that our tool "is there for her when she needs it."

But we know there are no single, fail-safe solutions to addiction recovery and we know that relapse not only can lead to overdose, it also serves as one of the primary reasons why people fall back into the

criminal justice system. The Council of State Governments Justice Center found that 45% of state prison admissions nationwide result from probation, parole or technical violation. Not only does this mean that individual continues on a negative path, it also translates into an average cost for an incarcerated adult in Ohio FY 2021 of \$97.00 per day, or \$35,000 a year.

A more holistic approach can improve outcomes. A study done by the University of Texas at Austin found an 11% lower recidivism rate for inmates who participated in drug treatment programs than those who did not. And our partners in this pilot are skilled at reducing recidivism. A 2019 Ohio Department of Corrections report found that community-based correctional facilities were the most successful correctional facility for reducing recidivism with a 76% successful completion rate.³

This pilot is designed to reduce recidivism and promote recovery by ensuring that our 250 participants, 50 drawn from each facility, have access to a full array of treatments including the Anchored platform with enhancements including self-efficacy experiences and training. By starting further upstream, combining it with all treatment approaches, and then ensuring participants can use the platform as a step-down tool when returning to family and work, we believe we can accomplish the dual policy goals of lower costs for incarceration and greater numbers of people able to join the workforce.

And, as was committed to in our conversations with the Ohio House, we will share all outcomes with the General Assembly prior to the next biennium budget, allowing for a full evaluation and consideration of expansion if appropriate.

We're excited to go to work and welcome your questions.